

FLORAL MERCHANDISING TIPS FOR BOOSTING FLORAL PURCHASES

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The U.S. green industry—producers of indoor and outdoor flowers and plants—has seen cash receipts rise an average \$500 million per year for more than a decade despite a steady loss of domestic market share to foreign growers. Consumer confidence in a robust economy, along with relatively high disposable income and low unemployment, and low interest rates that spur new housing and businesses, pushed floral and plant product purchases to a record \$55 billion in 1998. Of these retail expenditures for nursery and greenhouse products, environmental horticulture (trees, shrubs, bedding and garden plants, and turfgrass) products generated \$38 billion in retail sales (\$141 per capita) while floriculture (cut flowers, cut cultivated greens, and potted flowering and foliage plants) product sales totaled \$16 billion (\$61 per capita) in 1998. Green industry sales are projected to grow at twice the rate of the general economy in 1999, with retail sales expected to top \$57 billion—\$40 billion for environmental horticulture and \$17 billion for floriculture products.

Of the \$16 billion retail floral sales, floral industry statistics suggest 80% - 90% of those purchases were impulse sales. And with an increasing percentage of floral sales occurring at supermarkets and other non-traditional outlets (approximately 45% of sales), the continuation of such a trend places an impetus on the ability to not only capture the impulse buyer's attention, but to also boost the floral impulse purchases with more customers and/or higher dollar value of sales per customer. Following are ten tips for boosting those floral impulse purchases.

Idea 1: *Offer only quality plants and floral arrangements.*

Regardless of whether floral items are sold by the individual stem or as part of complete arrangements and bouquets, top quality plants in excellent condition attract the greatest attention. Capturing the initial glance from the customer is a critical first step in getting that impulse purchase. Creative, exciting, colorful displays can draw customers, but if the product isn't acceptable, the customer doesn't become a buyer.

Quality is number one among buyer concerns. Arrangements or displays must look clean, fresh and full or robust to be attractive to the consumer. Avoid inventory of questionable quality. Poor quality plants have no place in a floral department. "Reduced prices"—yes; but there is no such thing as a "reduced quality" plant, only good or bad plants in the eyes of the paying customer.

Idea 2: *Create displays that emphasize special products or services.*

Special personal events are those times that stimulate a customer to buy floral arrangements. Weddings, birthdays, holidays, special occasions (Grandparents' Day, Secretary's Day, graduations, Super Bowl, Mardi Gras, Cinco de Mayo, Kentucky Derby, etc.), and parties are happy times that spur demand for floral products. Other unplanned events that lead to spontaneous sales of floriculture include going out with the guys to golf or play cards on the spur of the moment.

Idea 3: *Have an enthusiastic person available to provide information and assistance at all times.*

Lack of knowledge about how to care for a plant or floral arrangement frequently stops would-be buyers from making a purchase. Customers buy to meet wants and needs and solve problems, so the employee must stress benefits to customers after having determined what those needs are that are to be met. Avoiding jargon, the employee must discuss features that mean something to the customer, if necessary; but essential is the responsibility of the employee to know the merchandise.

Idea 4: *Create a friendly, comfortable atmosphere that encourages browsing.*

A casual layout of floral displays with plenty of space to move around encourages browsing, and the longer a customer browses, the more likely a purchase will be made when the reliance on the sale is impulse. The customer has to be comfortable in the area, or they won't stay long enough to make a selection. There is entertainment value in shopping when there is a pleasant selling environment. And a floriculture setting just begs to sell with the senses—sight, smell, touch.

Idea 5: *Use color to create original, eye-catching displays.*

The trend toward more color in what people buy will continue, so flowers need to be displayed for better eye and sales appeal. Contrasts and complements, symmetry and organization, flow and focus—these are the buzzwords of the artist and the successful retailer. Even using colors appropriately for display counters and shelves for highlighting colorful arrangements encourages impulse purchases.

Idea 6: *Use themes to create interest in unusual plants and renew interest in everyday items.*

Themes can be of special events or of an atmosphere. Valentine's Day, Mothers' Day, and Christmas are well used themes; other themes for special days could include Mardi Gras (purples, yellows, whites and greens), Halloween (oranges, blacks and whites), Fourth of July (reds, whites, and blues), etc. Displays that bring in the flavor and colors of the Southwest are also very popular. An Indian print blanket across a table is a good, easy way to display cactus in clay pots.

Idea 7: *Offer the entire display package, not just the individual items.*

Bundling is a well known and successful marketing technique that is not used in floriculture except for floral arrangements. However, a fall floral display that encompasses a bale of straw, some corn stalks, a few pot mums, a pumpkin and the like may be what the customer wants to duplicate with one-stop shopping. So why not offer a package deal for all the contents of a seasonal floral display priced accordingly?